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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 000684

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SUBJECT: RESULTS REPORT: TPC ON PRESS FREEDOM

¶11. DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY: In commemoration of World Press Freedom Day, PAS Harare organized a telepress conference (TPC) to stimulate discussion on what it means to have a free and responsible media, what it means to have a healthy working relationship between the government and media, and how media can enhance self-regulation and ethics.

¶12. MAY 3, 2005, SECOND QUARTER, FY 2005.

¶13. JUSTIFICATION AND OBJECTIVE: To celebrate World Press Freedom Day and to support Zimbabwean journalists in their quest to create more working space for journalists either by relief from stringent media laws, such as the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA), or by creating an environment where the GOZ no longer selectively enforces those laws to intimidate the media resulting in widespread self-censorship.

¶14. MPP THEME AND AUDIENCE: Democracy and Human Rights; Public Diplomacy.

¶15. AUDIENCE: More than 70 local journalists drawn from the privately owned media and the government-controlled print and electronic media packed the PAS auditorium to listen to and report on the TPC program that linked Harare, Johannesburg and Washington via a telephone hook up. The program featured John Ullmann, executive director of the World Press Institute (WPI); Ms. Marguerite Sullivan, author of "A Responsible Press Office;" PAO Smith as moderator in Harare with Mr. Foster Dongozi, Secretary General of the Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (ZUJ) and Mr. Rashweat Mukundu of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA)-Zimbabwe. Daniel Molokela, Human Rights Lawyer, and the Guardian (UK) newspaper correspondent Andrew Meldrum, who had been expelled by the Mugabe government joined from Johannesburg, South Africa.

¶16. The exchange ran for one and half hours and had to be ended to allow the journalists to attend a meeting with the Attorney General at ZUJ headquarters. All local media and correspondents, including South African Broadcasting Corporation Television and the state-run Zimbabwe Television Newsnet crew, covered the program. Post is duplicating audiotapes to send to Zimbabwean journalists in South Africa and the United Kingdom who have already phoned or e-mailed Post for copies of the program.

¶17. 5. RESULT/IMPACT: Our high expectations were fully realized. Ullmann and Sullivan's messages were well received. By exploring examples of both good practice and common errors, the U.S. panelists mapped out a course for press freedom, saying it requires carefully crafted and thoroughly debated public policies that provide the foundation for a pluralistic free press. Ullmann and Sullivan advocated a more democratic media system that allows diversity of opinion, adding that this, in turn, will lead to a more participatory and accountable government and to more sustainable national policies and practices.

Without such policies, democracy and even efficient governance becomes close to impossible.

¶18. PAS distributed more than 50 copies of "The Unfettered Press" handbook, as well as 25 copies of Ms. Sullivan's book "A Responsible Press Office." Many journalists also signed up to receive copies of the 2004 "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices." Post received a round of kudos for organizing "a stimulating program." Journalists expressed appreciation for the program, which several called "stimulating." ed the attention and tThey also expressed appreciation for realization that there is the international concern about their well being. Dongozi of ZUJ told us that the Embassy, by soliciting GOZ participation in a press freedom program, finessed the Attorney General into a position where he had no choice but to meet with journalists. Furthermore, he and Mukundu said believe that combined pressure from their organizations and the Embassy led to a series of articles in the State-run media attempting to justify the Information Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (IAPPA) and its enforcement. They were happy to see the Government addressing issues and forced - if only momentarily - to cease ad hominem name-calling.

¶9. PRESS COVERAGE: Separate reports to follow on TPC coverage and the political status of the media in the environment after the March 31 parliamentary elections.

¶10. NON-USG SUPPORT: We are very grateful to the Mail and Guardian newspaper in Johannesburg, South Africa for giving up its boardroom for the TPC program.

¶11. QUALITY OF SUPPORT: EXCELLENT. Kudos to Jenifer Bochner and IIP for an excellent program. While Ullman had excellent advice on how working journalists might carve out areas in which they can do objective investigative reporting, we were disappointed with his criticism of the that he twice obfuscated on the effects of the Patriot Act's effect on press freedom in the U.S. His apparent pre-disposition to see any regulation as hampering reporting, His comments allowed many Zimbabwean journalists to leave the program believing that the Patriot Act has eliminated or greatly restricted press freedom in the U.S., as the ZANU-PF and GOZ very often claim in their attempts to show moral equivalency on the issue. Because of this misperception, we appreciate any good counter-arguments on this issue, perhaps from Todd Leventhal's shop, IIP/SC/IPI, or other colleagues who have run into the problem.

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